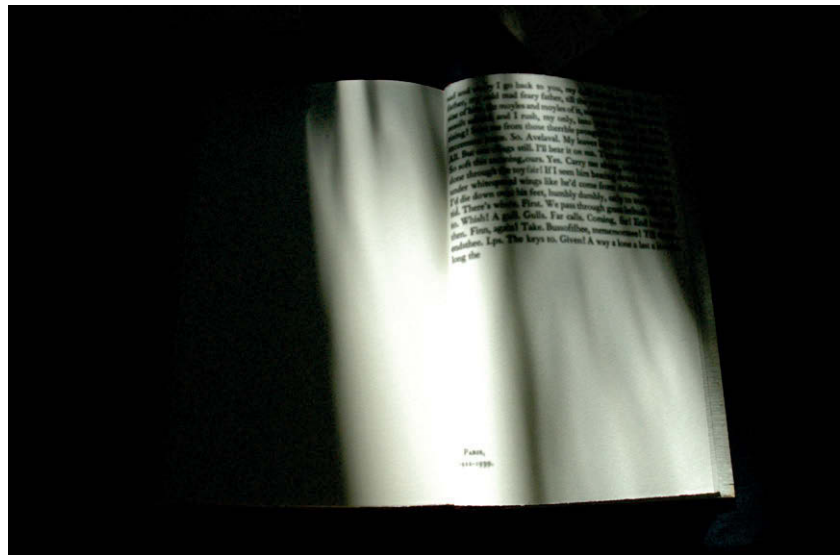




IT BEGINS IN THE BOOK

writing the material poem



JAMES STUART

Thesis submitted for a Masters of Creative Arts

University of Technology, Sydney

September 2009



Certificate of Authorship / Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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University of Technology, Sydney - 2009



Foreword

It Begins in the Book: writing the material poem is the title of my thesis, submitted as part of a candidature for a Masters of Creative Arts at the University of Technology, Sydney from March 2006 to September 2009. This period includes a leave of absence for the whole of 2008.

The practice-based components of my candidature are as follows:

The Homeless Gods (2006-2007)

A Flash poem presented as an interactive map interface

www.thehomelessgods.net

The Material Poem (2006-2007)

An anthology of text-based art and intermedia writing

www.nongeneric.net

Conversions (2008)

An exhibition of poetry in translation

www.nongeneric.net/itbeginsinthebook

The exegesis contained in this document forms the research-based component of my candidature. It should be read in concert with the accompanying website: www.nongeneric.net/itbeginsinthebook. This website replicates all written information contained herein and also provides additional images relating to the above practice-based components. Content exclusive to the website has been replicated on a CD, attached to the hard-copy of this thesis.

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Abstract

It Begins in the Book: writing the material poem comprises practice-led research in the form of three creative projects, and a thesis. Its central question is how the theory and practice surrounding the materiality of language can be applied in the context of poetic practice.

The first of the three creative projects is *The Material Poem: an e-anthology of media-specific writing and text-based art*, published in mid-2007. The second, *The Homeless Gods*, is an online poem-world developed using Flash. The third and final work is *Conversions*, an exhibition of Chinese poetry in translation. I explore the processes underpinning them through dedicated project assessments. All projects are in some way collaborative and all parties are duly acknowledged.

The thesis formulates a model by which these works (and other literary endeavours engaged with the materiality of language) can be critically assessed.

The first proposition is that we must move beyond materiality's purely formal meaning. Accordingly, I have developed a three-pronged model of materiality that centres on the following questions: what enables, and how does, a reader to respond to a literary work (material basis); what socio-cultural forces influence the relationship between writers, readers and the language-object (materialism); and finally, the actual material expression (or materiality) of a language-object. This is the subject of the first chapter.

The subject of the second chapter is how this model might be applied to a specific literary genre, poetry. Drawing on texts by Huisman, Riffaterre and Perloff, I argue that poetry's material basis is driven by its visual interface, its localised semiotic systems and, in the case of certain poetic traditions, ultimately indeterminate meaning. This material basis differs vastly from that of most other literary genres, indicating potential for experimentation with poetry's material form.

The third and final chapter centres on this assessment. Having established that interactivity and interface are emblematic of poetry's material basis, I revisit the conceptual and creative work of artists/architects Arakawa and Gins to develop a model of materiality that echoes their concepts of terrain, landing sites and perception stations. In turn, this provides me with the required critical framework to revisit and reassess my creative projects as complete "language-objects".